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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 000856

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR WHA, WHA/CCA, WHA/CEN, DRL, AND INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/08/2008

TAGS: PREL PHUM PGOV ETTC PINR CU HO UNHCR

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE CANDIDATES TO SERVE AS FIRST HONDURAN
AMBASSADOR TO CUBA

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 826

B. TEGUCIGALPA 763

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Roger Pierce;
Reasons 1.5 (B) and (D).

¶11. (C) The Honduran Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has not yet named a Honduran ambassador to Cuba. Several names have been circulating as potential candidates. As noted in reftel B, first among these is Rene Arturo Bendana, former Ambassador to Spain and to the U.S. under past President Rafael Callejas. Bendana, who owns an agribusiness, went to college in Mississippi and is pro-U.S. Bendana is considered the "dark side" candidate from the Nationalist Party. He was reportedly offered the Cuba ambassadorship by Nationalist Party officials, but has not received an official offer from the MFA. It appears that Bendana will accept the post should he receive an official offer.

¶12. (C) Two other candidate names have been circulating among political sources: Fernando MARTINEZ Jimenez, an architect by profession, was Foreign Minister during the Carlos Flores government. Born in 1944 in Comayaguela, Martinez graduated from the University of Kansas and is married to an American whom he met there, Karen Mary Casey. Martinez's tenure as Foreign Minister was notable for its philosophy that Honduran foreign policy should reflect domestic policy, thus "serving the entire country": an idea that boosted Martinez's popularity greatly. Martinez pruned the Foreign Service staff from 252 people to 120, firing those whom he considered unnecessary or corrupt. Martinez left the office of Foreign Minister in January 1999 after a tumultuous tenure. Then-President Flores asked him to resign following a newspaper editorial scandal. The scandal apparently served as a convenient catalyst for a long-awaited dismissal by the President.

¶13. (C) Victor Meza, a former unofficial advisor to former President Flores, has also received mention as a possible candidate. Meza studied in the Soviet Union at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow from 1965-1968 and is a former member of the Communist Party. Due to his leftist ties, Meza was off limits to embassy employees during the 1980's. He has since become a contact of the Embassy. Meza was an advocate of diminished power for the Honduran Armed Forces during the 1990's; he believed that the military's power undermined the country's democratic development. Meza also served as a valuable source of information for the embassy on human rights and other issues. He is seen by many observers as a very capable political analyst with good insights into the political scene in Honduras. He currently heads the Honduran Documentation Center (CEDOH), and is a leader of the NGO Citizens Forum. Meza speaks Russian but no English. He has not received any official notice of his candidacy for the ambassadorship, though he has told the Embassy he has heard numerous rumors that he may be called upon for the position.

¶14. (C) COMMENT: Ambassador urged President Ricardo Maduro on March 28 to further delay the naming of an ambassador in the wake of Fidel Castro's recent crackdown on human rights/democracy advocates (ref A). END COMMENT.
Palmer